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ABSTRACT

With today's demands for accountability, some new methods should be evolved for evaluating the services given by the school library media center. Since circulation counts, head counts, and similar statistics have provided only an approximation of the real services provided, an opinionnaire was devised to survey the faculty about library use, quality of materials and services, and the role of the resource teacher. An analysis of the data from the survey showed: (1) the resource center (RC) as "firmly entrenched in the teaching methodology of a majority of the faculty reporting", (2) a desire for further acquisition of books and periodicals, (3) a need for more staff, (4) a desire for new or reinstated services, and (5) a low priority for "maintaining order in the RC." The anonymity of the survey also provided an opportunity for faculty to express some criticisms, which were helpful to the resource teacher. A sample of the opinionnaire is included. (LS)

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SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA SERVICES EVALUATED:

A Sample Instrument

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Accountability is upon us! No longer is it possible, if indeed it ever was, to generalize on success or failure insofar as school library programs are concerned. The school library media center today must look at its operation with the cold eye of the business manager whose difficult question is, "What returns can you show me to justify your expenditure of funds?" He cannot be answered with a vague wave of the hands and an enthusiastic, "Oh, the library is busy all the time. I am sure we are worth every penny!"

As ardently as we all may believe this to be true, not only the business manager but the general public is increasingly requesting proof of the claims made for libraries, especially in view of the escalating costs of materials and buildings. Staffing of school libraries to somewhere near Commonwealth standards, too, means additional personnel--again, translating into MONEY. "What do these people do to earn their salaries?" is another query the school library media administrator must be prepared to answer satisfactorily. How can she do it!

There are tried and true methods of partially fulfilling these demands for accountability. Circulation records which show use via statistics, both as to how many materials were checked out and in what categories, are valid. However, as libraries cater to the increasing number of students on independent study with blocks of time to spend in the library, circulation figures do not truly represent "use" since these students use many materials in the library that are never checked out at all. Similarly, there seems to be no realistic way to count students and faculty who productively browse among the library's materials, achieving their needs in that manner--again, without the necessity of check-out. This is especially true where non-print materials are concerned, although a simple card file may be established with marks entered for each time a filmstrip, for example, is viewed. This system is usually done by the student user himself; therefore, it is only as accurate as he is.

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Some librarians attempt an actual daily count of students and faculty in the library and keep such records on a cumulative basis, tallying monthly and then totalling at the end of a school year. The figure, then, reflects physical beings in the library for whatever reason. The unreliability of such a figure is obvious. However, it might be productive to do such a spot count twice daily for a target period such as every other month, using the resulting figure as an indication of use, not as a solid statistic.

Since classes must be scheduled into the library for lessons or special work, a sign-up sheet may be used to indicate how many classes have actually been accommodated. The librarian should keep a record of how many lessons and of what kind she has presented during the school year. It is easy to keep an account of the number of subject bibliographies, library lessons, independent study units and the like prepared during the year. These are definite, achieved goals. It is impossible, though, to measure the impact and influence of the librarian's contacts with faculty members and students, surely the most important service she performs. With no way to report this objectively, how does she explain that warm glow of achievement such contacts occasion! Accountability systems do not allow for such remarks as "I helped students appreciate good illustrations in books in today's lesson" or "I feel Betty Lou chose a better magazine because of our talk". Only straight-forward replies of "YES" and "NO" are considered correct.

The Opinionnaire

Faced with the truth of the foregoing, librarians have been obliged to formulate an approach to the problem of measuring the degree of success or lack of success of their school library media program of services. One such attempt is given here.

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Opinionnaire

of

Resource Center Services

Department: _____

Specific courses taught: _____

I. USE OF THE RESOURCE CENTER

1. Have you planned course activities around utilization of the R.C. so far this academic year? _____yes _____no. If yes, briefly describe the activity/learning experience:

2. Have you encouraged or sent individual students to use the R.C.? _____yes _____no. If yes, approximate number? _____ For what type of activity?

3. Have you discussed with your classes the existence and purposes of the R.C.? _____yes _____no.

4. Have you investigated the R.C. for materials to take to class, for ideas for units, for personal use? _____yes _____no. Were you successful in finding useful materials? _____yes _____no. If yes, please check the kinds of materials you found _____books _____magazines _____reference works _____maps _____charts _____pamphlets _____audiovisual materials.

5. Have you discussed with the Resource Teacher possible future use of the R.C. by your classes or by individual students? _____yes _____no. If yes, briefly indicate nature of your ideas/plans:

6. Have students who have used the R.C. on a directed basis from your class generally been _____satisfied _____non-committal _____dissatisfield with work there? Briefly indicate tenor of feedback you may have received:

II. EVALUATION OF MATERIALS

1. In general, do you feel the R.C. has sufficient materials useful for your particular courses and methods of teaching? _____yes _____no.

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2. In general, do you feel the R.C. should have more reference materials, i.e. indexes, dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc.? If yes, which ones?
3. In general, do you feel the R.C. has sufficient trade books, i.e. novels, biographies, non-fiction? If not, what should be added?
4. Do you feel the R.C. should maintain a core collection of textbooks used in our school? _____yes _____no.
5. Do you feel the R.C. should have more periodicals? If yes, of what types or of what subject representation (please give examples of specific titles): _____yes _____no.
6. In general, do you feel the R.C. has a sufficient representation of audiovisual materials? _____yes _____no. If not, which types (filmstrips, slides, etc.) should be added?
7. Do you have any additional comments about the TYPES of materials now in the R.C.?

III. EVALUATION OF SERVICES

1. Have you had problems
   a. using the card catalogs? _____yes _____no
   b. finding materials in the R.C.? _____yes _____no
   c. finding materials on a given subject? _____yes _____no
      If yes, what subject?
   d. determining how to use materials and/or machines? _____yes _____no
   e. finding sufficient materials for a class assignment of project? _____yes _____no. If yes, which subject?
2. Which of the above problems have your students specifically mentioned in connection with use of the R.C.?
3. In your opinion, what is the major strength of the R.C.?
4. In your opinion, what is the major drawback to use of the R.C.?
5. Do you feel new materials are adequately publicized? _____yes _____no. If no, what suggestions do you make?
6. State what improvements in services and/or materials you would find most useful:

IV. ROLE OF THE RESOURCE TEACHER:

1. Have you found it beneficial to work with the Resource Teacher to develop the potential of the R.C. for your students and for yourself?

_____yes _____no. If yes, what was the major contribution made by the Resource Teacher to this work?

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If no, what service was not performed by the Resource Teacher which you desired?

2. List some ways you think the Resource Teacher could be of more direct assistance to you.

3. On a priority basis (1 down to 8), rank order the tasks the Resource Teacher should perform, in your opinion:

_____preparing bibliographies for teachers and students

_____routing catalogs, brochures, ordering information to faculty

_____revising the card catalogs

_____maintaining order in the R.C.

_____acquisitions of new materials

_____in-service work with teachers on R.C. materials

_____developing 'how to use' modules of study

_____assisting in preparation of individualized instruction packets

4. Add here any additional comments on the role of the Resource Teacher which you do not feel have been covered above

(Use reverse if needed):

Procedure

After discussing the entire project with the school principal, the opinionnaire was designed to cover those areas of program and service applicable to faculty. A similar questionnaire aimed at eliciting student responses was planned as a natural supplement. A cover letter to each faculty member was prepared to accompany the opinionnaire, briefly requesting co-operation in compiling some tangible evidence concerning relationships with the Center. Teachers were asked to indicate their academic department but were also

instructed not to sign their name. A time limit of two weeks was suggested for completion, in order that replies might be tallied and published before the end of the school year. The due date also made it possible for orders to be placed concerning requested materials so that they would be on hand when school re-opened.

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Evaluation

Well within the time limit, returns began to arrive. A total of eighty-five (85) opinionnaires had been distributed, and seventy-two (72) came back, a gratifying response in itself. Sections I and II reaffirmed what was already suspected--the Resource Center was firmly entrenched in the teaching methodology of a majority of the faculty reporting. Several suggestions were given for desired acquisitions, more in the field of periodicals than in any other. The only real difference of opinion was reflected on Question 4 of Section II about the inclusion of a core collection of textbooks in the school library, with more answering "yes" (47) than "no" (25). This may be partially explained by the fact that the particular school had many programs of independent study outside the classroom and possibly teachers felt the student should have access to copies of textbooks in a central place such as the library in case they had forgotten their own. Traditionally, libraries have not included textbooks in their regular collection for very good reasons; however; it was a simple matter to establish book carts clearly labelled to hold such a core collection and make them accessible to any student so in need.

Section III on evaluation of services was generally affirmative including the replies to Question 4, "What is the major drawback to use of the R.C.?" "Too many people and not enough staff" came back resoundingly! Of course, there were a few disgruntled faculty users who vented a little spleen in prose--a useful exercise, since the anonymity of the reply allowed for the expression of sore points. In those cases, the problems cited came as NEWS to the Resource Teacher and thus fulfilled the purpose of the opinionnaire--to inform with a view to improve. The remarks were received, as well as given, in that vein.

Section IV contained some specific suggestions for possible new services or the reinstatement of some which had been discontinued for various reasons. Question 3 of this section was of particular interest to the Resource Teacher, since establishing priorities which are recognized as such by others is always difficult. Happily, "maintaining order in the R.C." emerged far down on the faculty's list--a major victory in the universal and continuing battle by all librarians to allow the school library media center to function as a specialized classroom rather than as a morgue.

Over-all, it might be said that the opinionnaire was good for everyone concerned. The faculty was asked for its feelings, and the Resource Center staff (as well as the school principal) read them thoughtfully and took the suggestions to heart. Communication was achieved, and with any luck at all, services and personal relations were strengthened. While the present example could doubtless be improved, it did serve its purpose in the difficult problem of assessing library worth by an acid test--the judgment of the school faculty.

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